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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002460

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2015

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SUBJECT: UNIFICATION MINISTRY DISCUSSES DPRK RESTRICTIONS  
ON KAESONG AND FAMILY REUNIONS

REF: SEOUL 2254

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Unification Ministry officials on July 21 told the A/DCM that the North seemed to be showing its anger with the ROKG decision to halt food and fertilizer assistance by cutting inter-Korean governmental contact at the Kaesong Industrial Complex and suspending family reunion projects. The ROKG still sought to maintain a minimal amount of inter-Korean dialogue, but assessed that the latest North-South stalemate would take time, and perhaps a high-level ROKG emissary, to overcome. END SUMMARY.

DPRK RESPONDS TO ROKG AID CURTAILMENT

2. (C) During a July 21 luncheon, Um Jeong-sik, Director General for Unification Policy Planning at the Ministry of Unification (MOU), and his colleagues told the A/DCM that the North earlier that day demanded that ROKG officials vacate a joint economic cooperation liaison office located in the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the only ROKG presence in North Korea. This followed the DPRK decision this week to suspend humanitarian projects, including a plan for videoconferenced family reunions that was set for August and construction on a 13-story family reunion facility at Mt. Kumgang, North Korea.

3. (C) Um explained that at the 19th round of inter-Korean ministerials last week in Busan, the DPRK delegation was unusually forceful in its demand for more food and fertilizer assistance. In the past, the DPRK would generally request humanitarian aid in a quieter manner, such as on the last day of ministerials or in a pull-aside with South Korean delegates. When the South refused to accommodate the DPRK demands and instead expressed regret over the missile launches and called on the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks, the North Koreans warned that Seoul would have to pay for its decision. Um said the recent expulsions and cancellations were part of the "North Korean bill." (NOTE: Assistant Unification Minister Park Chan-bong on July 6 opined to the A/DCM that if the ROK refused food and fertilizer aid the North might respond by halting family

reunions (reftel). END NOTE.)

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STALEMATE NOT NEW FOR NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE

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14. (C) Um mentioned that the DPRK response was unfortunate, but it was not unusual. Inter-Korean talks had broken down before, most notably in 2001 after the South raised its alert status after the September 11 attacks, and again in 2004 after the airlift of some 450 North Korean refugees to South Korea from Vietnam. Both times North-South ministerials were delayed for about a year, only to be resumed after the South sent a high-level emissary, then Special Presidential Security Adviser Lim Dong-won in 2002 and then Unification Minister Chung Dong-young in 2005, to see North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. (COMMENT: Um did not say that a visit by Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok was being considered. However, some press have speculated that when the next round of ministerials, yet to be scheduled, are held in the North, it would provide a natural occasion for Minister Lee, in his role as chief ROKG delegate, to seek a meeting with Kim Jong-il. END COMMENT.)

15. (C) Asked whether the ROKG had experienced any public pressure to restore humanitarian aid to salvage family reunions, Um said that it was too soon for that kind of pressure to mount, but over time it would be expected to rise. Um said that military exercises scheduled for this summer, including Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC) in July and the U.S.-ROK Ulchi Focus Lens (UFL) in August, would probably delay inter-Korean talks regardless of the current situation. The ROKG was likely to adopt a wait-and-see attitude to ascertain how upset the North was this time and inter-Korean relations would probably worsen before they

improved.

16. (C) Um speculated that it was relatively painless for North Korea to stop inter-Korean governmental contacts at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, to suspend family reunions, and to postpone construction on the family reunion center because none of these things really cost the North anything. Echoing what A/MOU Park said on July 6, it would probably cost the South something to eventually turn these things back on. Still, the North might feel some pressure to get fertilizer restarted because it would not want to miss the planting season.

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NEXT STEPS

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17. (C) Um opined that he thought it unlikely that the North would seek to enflame inter-Korean and international tension by doing anything as significant as a nuclear test. Um also thought it unlikely that the North would conduct another long range missile test in the near future.

18. (C) Um commented that he was unsure whether North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun would agree to meet with the foreign ministers of the Six Party Talks member countries on the sidelines of next week's meetings at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). FM Paek's background was on inter-Korean affairs, so he might have less confidence or even less authority to conduct a meeting with the Secretary because he lacked experience on U.S.-DPRK matters, Um said.

19. (C) In discussing the Arirang Festival, Um stated that the ROKG was not planning to send a government delegation, but it was unlikely to stop South Korean citizens from attending the event. Um noted that a better term for the event might be the "Arirang Performance," adding that it was more of a Broadway musical than a celebration of North Korean ideology. He emphasized that UNSCR 1695 was targeted against DPRK WMD programs and there was no direct link to the Arirang events. The A/DCM suggested that the optics of South Korean officials going to Pyongyang to view a homage to Kim Il-Sung would not be welcomed in many capitals. Especially in the aftermath of the missile launches, the ROKG might want to

consider issuing some kind of travel advisory or at least state Seoul's view of the event, even if it would not ban civilian travel to the North, the A/DCM said.

¶10. (C) Um remarked that the ROKG had yet to decide whether it would send a ROKG delegation to the August 15 Liberation Day or the Arirang events in North Korea. He noted that ROKG participation in the Liberation Day events was a reciprocal commitment and a follow-up to a DPRK delegation that visited Seoul last year. The head of the 200-person DPRK delegation last year visited the National Cemetery in Seoul and met with President Roh Moo-hyun.

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